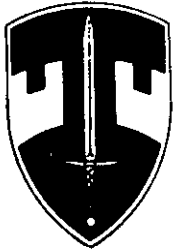


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**WHAT A PLATOON LEADER  
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT  
THE ENEMY'S JUNGLE TACTICS**



HEADQUARTERS  
ARMED FORCES OF R.V.N.  
OFFICE OF JOINT GENERAL STAFF - J-2

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FOREWORD

This handbook is an attempt to familiarize platoon leaders operating in the jungle with the common tactics employed by the enemy in the jungle. The information is general in nature and was derived from interviews with knowledgeable platoon leaders who were forced to learn many of these oft-repeated tactics through experience. It is hoped that this handbook will provide some understanding of these enemy tactics and equip the platoon leader to make more intelligent assessments of situations he is likely to encounter.

*Charles A. Morris, Col*  
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Brigadier General, USA  
Assistant Chief of Staff, J2

12 October 1967

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## WHAT A PLATOON LEADER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE ENEMY'S JUNGLE TACTICS

### I. INTRODUCTION.

A. The purpose of this handbook is to describe the jungle tactics, techniques, and deceptions which have been used over and over again by the enemy, often with alarming success. It is hoped that knowledge of these oft-repeated tactics will help the small unit leader to make a more intelligent assessment of the enemy situation by better understanding what to expect from the enemy during both movement and meeting engagements in the jungle.

B. The terrain of South Vietnam ranges from rugged mountain peaks, 2500 meters high, to marshy plains below sea level. Much of this terrain is covered with dense rain forests that have become the traditional refuge areas for VC forces. Two distinct types of jungle are found in South Vietnam: the multicanopied forest with dense undergrowth, prevalent in the mountainous regions; and the mangrove swamps, peculiar to the Delta and coastal areas. (The map on page 2 depicts some of the more common areas where rugged jungle may be found.)

1. In I, II, and III Corps Tactical Zones, typical jungle terrain consists of a multicanopied forest with dense undergrowth. Generally, the trees are 25 to 30 meters high. Trees are two to three meters apart, and the distance between the ground and first foliage is 5 to 10 meters. Tree diameters vary from 40 to 150 centimeters (16 to 57 inches). The undergrowth consists of mosses, ferns, vines, bushes, briars,





and grasses from one to three meters high. The bushes are two to three meters high, and vines and briars wind around the trees, extending up to the tree canopy. As elevation increases, the density of undergrowth decreases. At elevations higher than 1200 meters, an undergrowth of moss and grass is most prevalent. Throughout South Vietnam are many scattered forests of bamboo which are virtually impossible to travel through without first cutting a trail.

2. In IV Corps Tactical Zone, the terrain is subject to coastal flooding. Mangrove tidal swamps are very prevalent. The mangrove tidal swamp is a very dense evergreen forest growing in coastal areas flooded by the daily tide. The height of the trees ranges from 2 to 18 meters, averaging about 5 meters. They normally have a double-layered canopy, with the younger trees forming the lower canopy. Throughout the entire mangrove forest area there are many vines which hang down from the trees and twine among them. The undergrowth commonly consists of marsh grass, reeds, rushes, and palm bushes, usually about two meters high.

3. Some of the fiercest encounters involving company and platoon-sized actions have occurred in jungle terrain. There are several reasons why these engagements have often been costly for friendly forces:

a. The fight, on the average, becomes joined at ranges between 12 and 20 meters, which are too close to afford any real advantage to our crew-served weapons.

b. Marking smoke, for air and artillery support, cannot be used effectively where the top canopy of the jungle is 15 to 20 meters high or of triple thickness.

c. Over-eagerness, often resulting from periods of fruitless search, causes small unit leaders to assault enemy positions without stopping to analyze the situation and to use all available firepower in coordination with good schemes of maneuver.

d. Supporting fires, to avoid striking friendly positions, must allow too wide a margin of error to influence the action.

e. Mortars are of no use unless they can be based where overhead clearance is available.

f. The advance of reinforcements is often erratic, ponderous, and exhausting.

g. Air medical evacuation is often difficult.

C. VC/NVA jungle warfare calls for repeated use of ambushes, mines, and boobytraps. This handbook points out those tactics and techniques which have often been used by the enemy in the past. The examples and illustrations covered in the handbook are not an attempt to cover the gamut of enemy jungle tactics. This would be impractical, if not impossible, to attempt in a single publication. The handbook is only an

attempt to provide some conclusions concerning enemy jungle tactics based on reports provided by those small unit leaders who have encountered them in past operations.

## II. OFFENSIVE TACTICS.

A. General. The ambush has been the most frequently and successfully used enemy offensive tactic in jungle terrain. Jungle ambushes are normally established on natural routes of movement such as trails and streams. They are characteristically short, violent actions followed by a rapid withdrawal.

B. When Ambushes Can Be Expected. Enemy ambushes have been conducted at all hours of the day and night; however, as would be expected, the majority of ambushes occur during daylight hours. Almost 1/3 of all enemy ambushes occur during the morning hours, at which time friendly troops are moving out from their base camps to conduct daily operations. Often they have set up ambushes behind friendly patrols after they have left their patrol bases. There have been cases in which patrols retraced their routes and were caught in ambushes at times when patrol members were tired and security was lax.

### C. Planning Ambushes.

1. The enemy uses great patience in studying friendly movement methods and techniques. He is quick to detect any pattern of regularity in friendly activity.

2. The dense jungle undergrowth found in some areas, combined with the dark shadow of the canopy, limits ground observation to five meters; some enemy ambushes have been initiated at just that distance. Excellent fire discipline, particularly in the case of NVA units, has resulted in friendly elements walking within point-blank range of enemy small arms. The enemy initiates the action as close as possible in order to reduce the fire superiority and air power of friendly forces.

D. Ambush Indicators. Based on observation and experience of small unit leaders, the following list of indicators has been compiled to assist platoon leaders in determining the likelihood of ambush sites in their area of operations:

1. Tied-down brush. It may be a firing lane for an ambush site.
2. Villages with no people present. They may conceal ambushes, but it should be remembered that the presence of civilians in an area does not preclude the possibility of ambush. The VC often make themselves appear as "innocent" civilians in order to deceive friendly commanders into thinking the area is free of VC.
3. Large herds of cattle and well-tended crops in a sparsely populated area.

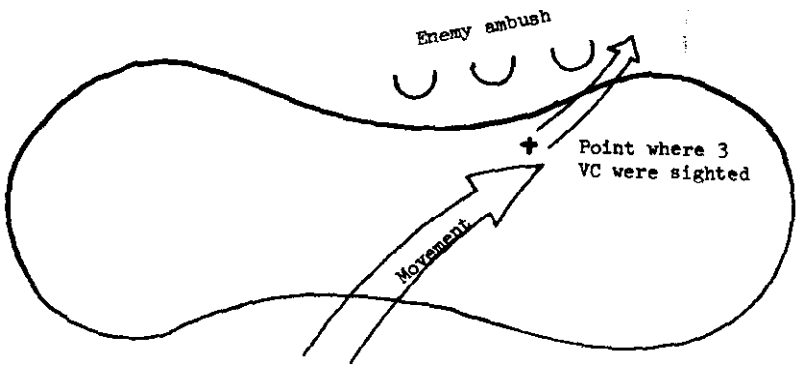
4. An unusual amount of activity in a specific area. Activities which should be noted are reports of unknown units in the area and sightings of VC reconnaissance elements.

5. A steady delivery of small arms fire from one position. While this may appear to be aimed at checking or delaying movement, it may actually be designed to encourage pursuit.

6. Sniper fire. The enemy will use snipers to draw friendly forces into ambush positions. The snipers will fire harassing rounds; and, upon pursuit by the friendly force, they will fall back and draw the force into an ambush.

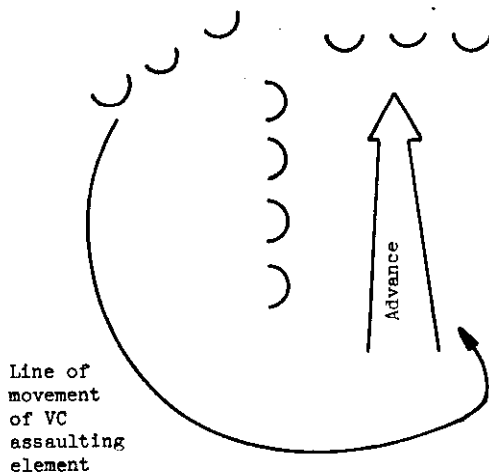
E. Ambush Tactics and Formations. The enemy has used varying tactics and formations when initiating offensive actions. A few examples will illustrate some of the more common tactics which the enemy has successfully employed against friendly forces in the jungle. It should be remembered, however, that these formations and techniques will vary according to the terrain, mission, and enemy units involved.

1. Lure and Ambush.



The "lure and ambush" is a commonly used enemy tactic. The basic principle is to draw the attention of friendly forces and lure them into prepared positions. Many variations of this tactic have been noted during movement in jungle terrain. In one instance, a friendly platoon was patrolling near War Zone C. Several hundred meters short of its turn-around point it entered a keyhole-shaped jungle clearing, about 150 meters from treeline to treeline. The patrol entered the clearing in a column formation. When the head of the column was two-thirds of the way across the clearing, the point man spotted three enemy soldiers with backs turned. They stood 15 meters to the left front of the column and 10 meters short of the treeline. Without turning, they darted away toward the jungle, and the lead files of the patrol turned to pursue. The turning of the column spread it neatly in front of the killing zone of an ambush, which was deployed just inside the treeline.

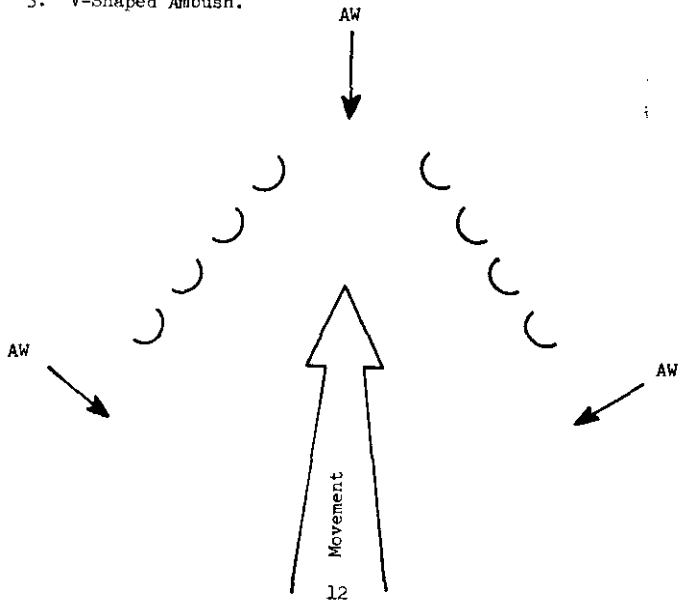
2. I-Shaped Ambush.





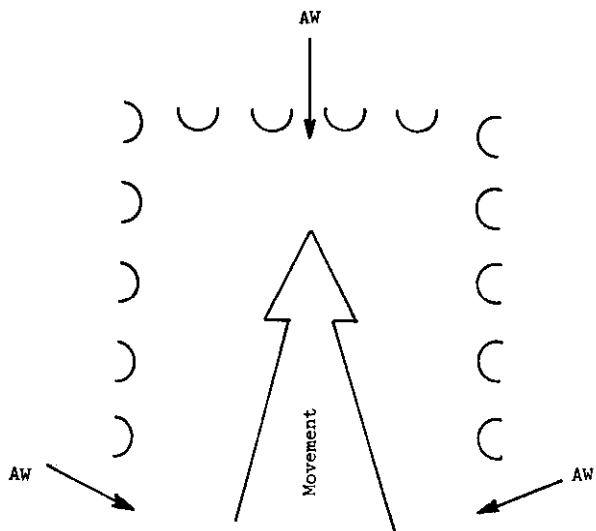
In the L-shaped ambush, the long axis is normally positioned in a tree-line and parallel to a road or trail. Deployment in an "L" formation enables the VC/NVA to mass a heavy concentration of fire both on the flank and down the length of a moving column. Employment of reserves adds flexibility to this type of ambush. Reserves can be used to reinforce either axis of the ambush, as a maneuvering element in enveloping friendly forces, and as a blocking force to cut off withdrawal routes or to ambush friendly reinforcements.

3. V-Shaped Ambush.



The V-shaped ambush is usually positioned along a trail or path. Automatic weapons are placed at the vertex and down each side of the "V." This formation enables the enemy to place a heavy volume of fire on both flanks and down the length of an approaching column. Claymore mines have often been positioned in front of the automatic weapons to repel any attempt to roll up the flanks or break through the ambush.

4. U-Shaped Ambush.



As with the L- and V-shaped ambushes, the "U" formation is also encountered during movement on jungle trails. The enemy places automatic weapons well to the front of the ambush site in order to seal off withdrawal from the trap. Claymores are also employed with this ambush formation.

### III. DEFENSIVE TACTICS.

#### A. General.

1. The enemy generally avoids the defense because he cannot withstand friendly firepower. However, he has tenaciously defended vulnerable units, bases, and installations for short periods of time. The enemy prepares extensive defensive positions throughout his operational areas. Defenses are prepared along trails and other avenues of approach. Boobytraps and mines are often incorporated into these defensive positions, particularly in base camp areas.

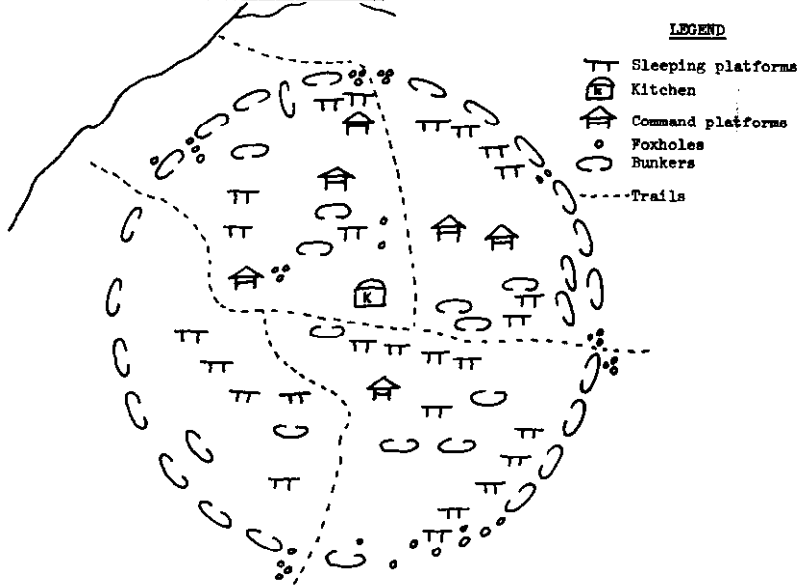
2. The enemy can move into an area and prepare bunkers and trench-lines overnight. If contacted, he attempts to hold these fortified positions throughout daylight hours, and then he withdraws in small groups over carefully planned escape routes during the hours of darkness. If cut off, he occupies one of many other fortified areas and resumes defensive tactics.

B. Characteristics of Field Fortifications. Increasingly, the enemy is employing extensive field fortifications in conjunction with his operations. VC/NVA soldiers are enthusiastic diggers because they fear friendly artillery and air strikes. These fortifications are characterized by:

1. Defense in depth.
2. Extensive use of camouflage.
3. Mutually supporting defensive networks.
4. Restricted avenues of approach.
5. Escape routes.
6. Use of boobytraps, mines, and obstacles.
7. Use of tunnels, bunkers, communication trenches, and foxholes.

C. Camouflage. Fortified areas almost always present the greatest difficulties to friendly forces. In no other technique is the enemy more skilled than in the deceptive camouflaging of fortified base camps, supply caches, and villages. Nature is made to work in his favor; trees, shrubs, and earth are reshaped to conceal bunkers and trench lines. The density of the forest prevents observation from the air, and the thick undergrowth hinders ground forces from adequate observation of enemy base camps until after the camp has been discovered.

D. Fortified Enemy Base Camp.





The fortified enemy base camp is roughly circular in form with an outer rim of bunkers and foxholes enclosing a complete system of living quarters. However, the shape will vary according to the terrain, the rise and fall of the ground, and the use of natural features to restrict attack on the camp to one or two avenues. Some of the enemy bases, particularly those used only for training or commo-liaison, have minimum defensive works. In all cases, the enemy is prepared to defend against a ground attack until forced to withdraw as a result of friendly pressure.

#### IV. WITHDRAWAL TACTICS.

A. General. The VC/NVA include a withdrawal plan for every offensive and defensive operation. They characteristically conduct rapid withdrawals along preplanned, concealed escape routes. The more common tactics for evasion, escape, and withdrawal include:

1. Fragmenting.
2. Dispersing.
3. Hiding.
4. Deceiving.
5. Delaying.

B. Types of Withdrawal. These examples of withdrawal tactics are typical of those encountered by small unit leaders throughout South Vietnam, particularly in jungle terrain.

1. Fragmenting. On one occasion an NVA regiment, discovered in an area removed from its normal base area, was overrun and large amounts of supplies were captured and destroyed. As a

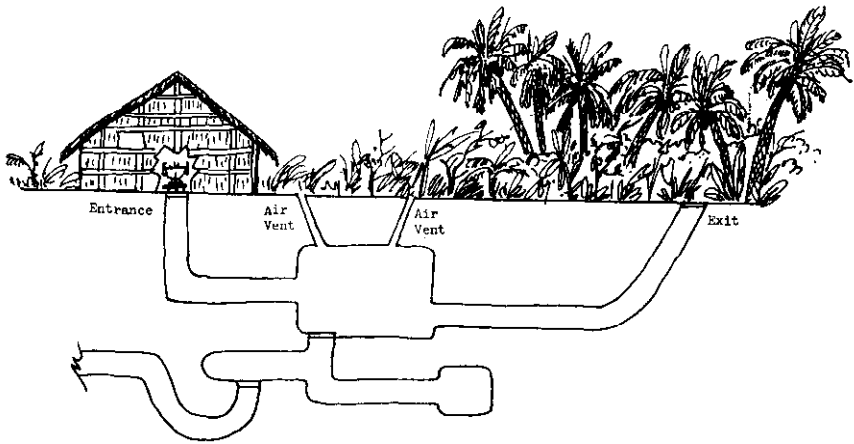
result, all the subsequent contacts were with small groups of 3 to 10 men. The remnants of the regiment had fragmented to exfiltrate the battle area toward their base camp. Often when enemy battalions have been surrounded and forced to fight, their ammunition has been used up before the end of one day. These enemy units then split into small groups and attempt to break through the encirclement.

2. Dispersing. Another favorite technique used by small VC forces in danger of an unfavorable, close-range contact is to drop their packs and run. Friendly forces have been inclined to slow pursuit in order to inspect the packs.

3. Hiding. Hiding places available to the VC/NVA are innumerable, although underground locations appear to be the favorite. Underground hiding places for troops and equipment range from simple spider holes to elaborately reinforced rooms. From the surface these underground installations are extremely difficult to detect. Critical points are entrances and exits, which may be concealed in gardens, animal pens, river banks, under piles of straw or dung, and in or under structures. (See diagram of tunnel complex, next page.)

4. Deceiving. VC/NVA forces have used deception to draw friendly forces away from base camps. Small enemy units will harass and then withdraw in an attempt to swing the Allied direction of movement away from a valuable area.

ENEMY TUNNEL COMPLEX



Extensive and ingeniously constructed underground tunnel systems are one of the unique features of the war in South Vietnam. They often underline fortified villages and base camps and have exits in concealed positions in the surrounding jungle.

5. Delaying. The VC/NVA have made extensive use of rear guard personnel to delay pursuing forces until withdrawal of the main element is accomplished. Also, ambushes designed to slow pursuers have often been employed.

V. MINES AND BOOBYTRAPS.

A. Mines. Enemy units do not make extensive use of conventional antipersonnel minefields in jungle terrain. Their present mine warfare doctrine calls for using numerous isolated mines and small groups of mines.

1. The VC/NVA rely heavily on the use of claymore mines. They employ both US and ChiCom claymores in all types of situations and engagements. Claymores are placed in trees, along trails, on perimeters of base camps and fortified villages, and at ambush sites.

2. One of the most common types of mines thus far encountered in jungle terrain is made with a ChiCom hand grenade. In enemy-controlled areas, these grenades are placed in well-traveled locations and detonated electrically. Thus, they can be controlled so that local people can walk back and forth over the area. When friendly troops are properly positioned, the enemy detonates the grenade. Long lead wires allow the person detonating the device

to be well clear of the area. Grenades are sometimes buried in groups, producing the same effect as conventional antipersonnel mines.

B. Boobytraps. Ranging from a simple hole in the ground to a complicated device, the boobytrap is an effective way for the enemy to cause casualties and harass, delay, and confuse friendly forces at little cost to themselves. The variety of these weapons is limited only by the imagination of the designer. The same tricks the enemy uses to lure victims into ambush sites are used to lure them into boobytrapped areas.

1. Explosive boobytraps are employed in all phases of enemy operations from combat to sabotage. They are fired in the same manner as mines using the same types of firing devices and fuzes. Non-explosive boobytraps are frequently used in conjunction with mines at ambush sites. The enemy employs crude, but effective trip wire devices along trails and paths, which release arrows, bamboo whips, and other swinging, barbed, and club-type objects. Muddy trails and heavy vegetation can provide all the camouflage necessary for spike traps and punji pits. The enemy is extremely good at disguising his traps. A favorite enemy tactic is to mine and boobytrap areas which friendly elements have recently occupied. Upon returning to these areas, friendly personnel are often caught unaware by these new traps.

2. In conducting past searches of VC villages, base camps, and supply caches, boobytraps have often been located in the following places:

- a. In or near gates or entrances.
- b. Anywhere normal work does not take place (next to trails, in graveyards, near shrines, etc.).
- c. At entrances to concealed tunnels.
- d. In rubbish.
- e. On propaganda boards and flags displayed in conspicuous locations.
- f. Near animal pens and other enclosures.
- g. Under dung piles and dead foliage.
- h. Near wells.

3. The enemy has also rigged weapons, uniforms, dead bodies, binoculars, and many other objects with explosive boobytraps.

C. Enemy Marking of Danger Areas. VC/NVA units have found it necessary to follow certain procedures in marking mined and boobytrapped areas. As yet, no standard pattern for marking these areas appears to exist; different enemy units seem to have their own techniques for marking danger areas. The only apparent doctrine on marking mines and boobytraps is that a VC or NVA unit must know the location of mines and boobytraps within its own operational area. Also, it must coordinate with local forces for guidance on mine and boobytrap locations when operating in unfamiliar areas.

D. Illustrated Examples of Mine and Boobytrap Markings. The illustrations contained in the following pages are examples of marking of mines and boobytraps which have been discovered by friendly elements. It should be remembered that all markers are subject to being disoriented by the effects of rain, wind, and animal and human movement through an area. Small unit leaders should insure that their personnel are thoroughly familiar with mine and boobytrap markings. Those presented in the illustrations should be anticipated at all times during movement along trails through jungle terrain. Many more types of markers are suspected to exist, and all personnel should be encouraged to report any new mine and boobytrap markers or indicators which are discovered. Doing this will aid in the reduction of friendly mine and boobytrap casualties.



1. Sign Markers.

VÙNG CẤM ĐI

Restricted Area  
Keep Away

TỬ ĐỊA

Kill Zone

XIN ĐỪNG ĐI

Please Don't Go

VÙNG CÓ BẦY

Area is Boobytrapped

VÙNG CÓ GAI BẦY

Boobytrapped Area or Zone

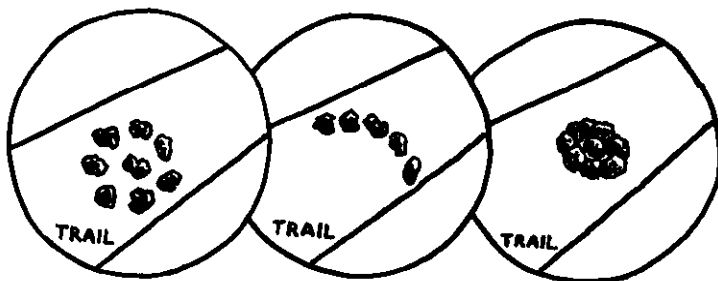
Various handwritten signs have been encountered warning all persons entering an area that a danger exists if they pass the sign. The danger area is usually 50 to 200 meters beyond the signs. These signs are normally placed in enemy rear areas and are scheduled for removal in the event friendly troops conduct operations in the area.

2. Parallel Sticks Marker.



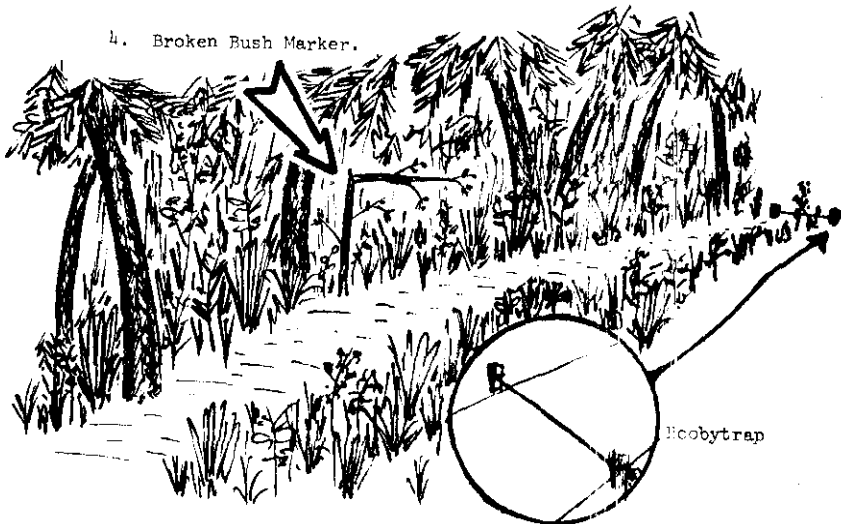
Short sticks or lengths of bamboo laid parallel to a trail reportedly means that the trail is free of mines or boobytraps in I CTZ.

### 3. Rock Markers on Trails.



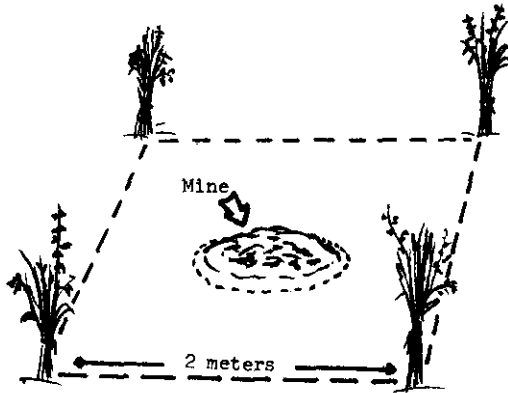
Various formations of small rocks have been reportedly placed on trails to serve as a warning of mines and boobytraps ahead. These rock formations have been placed in circular, pyramid, and straight line patterns.

4. Broken Bush Marker.



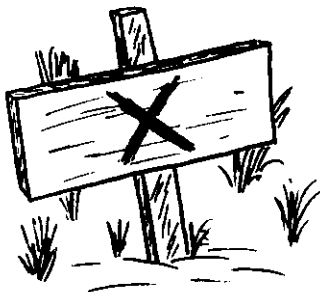
The VC break the top from a small sapling and strip most of the branches from it. One branch is left on the sapling and it points down the trail. Usually a mine or boobytrap has been found 50 to 100 meters down the trail.

5. Grass Marker.



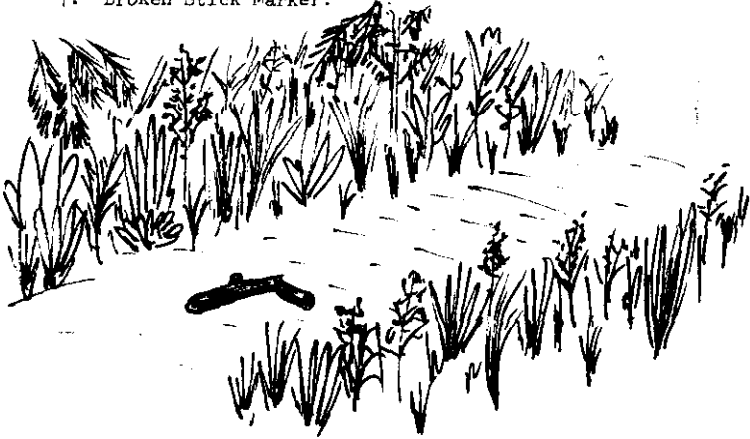
Growing grass is sometimes tied in four sheaves. The sheaves form a square with sides measuring approximately two meters. The mine is buried or concealed in the center of the square.

6. Red "X" Marker.



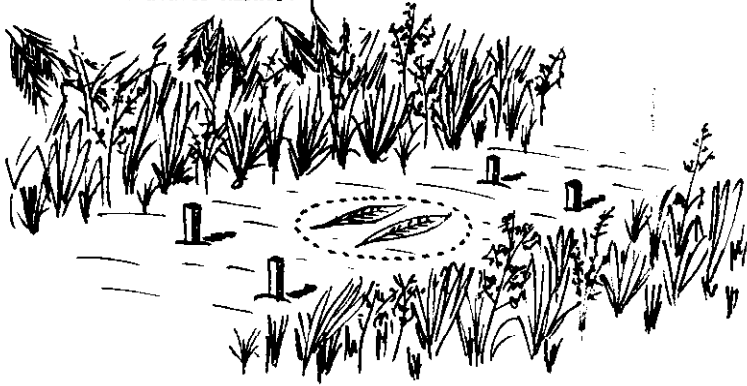
Red "X" signs are placed along trails leading to mined areas. This sign indicates a prohibited area and personnel should proceed with caution or by-pass the area. These signs have been found in both VC and GVN-controlled areas.

7. Broken Stick Marker.



A stick or length of bamboo broken at a right angle and lying across a trail has been used to warn of a mine or boobytrap 200 to 400 meters ahead.

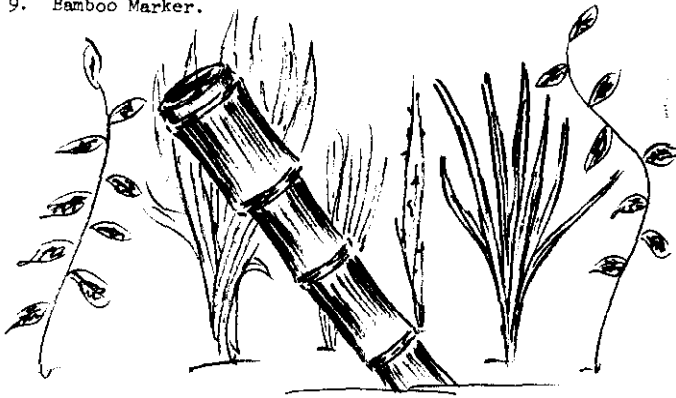
8. Stakes and Leaves Marker.



These two warning signs have been reportedly used in the same area. One marker consists of two large leaves placed parallel to each other on top of the mine or boobytrap. The second marker consists of two short sticks or stakes placed on the trail in front of and to the rear of the mine or boobytrap. These devices have been used individually and in conjunction with each other.

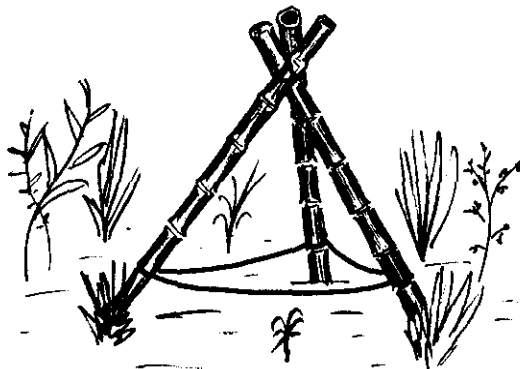


9. Bamboo Marker.



This marker consists of a small piece of bamboo six to eight inches long and a large joint of bamboo which is carved to fit over one end of the bamboo stick. The bamboo stick is stuck into the ground at about a 45° angle with the large end of the device pointing toward a mine or boobytrap.

10. Bamboo Tripod Marker.



The bamboo tripod marker consists of three pieces of bamboo approximately 18 inches long, tied together at one end and set up in a cone shape. Wire or another material is wrapped around the device near the bottom of the three legs so that the device will retain its cone shape. This device is placed over boobytraps, mines, and punji pits.

## VI. CONCLUSION.

A. VC/NVA jungle tactics call for repeated use of ambushes, mines, and boobytraps. They are used both separately and in combinations. The enemy is a master of camouflage and plans an ambush with great skill. He practices deception in all forms. He may lure you into a village or thick jungle by baiting you with a few men. When your initial estimate is light contact with a squad attempting to escape, the tendency is to pursue vigorously. Then, when the enemy has you positioned in the trap, he springs it. He holds his fire until you are well into the trap, and when he does spring it, he is almost on top of you.

B. Jungle warfare requires a reorientation from conventional tactics. A new approach to tactics and operations must be developed with greater emphasis on small unit tactics. Individual skills and tactics must be emphasized in order to allow small unit leaders to respond with the utmost flexibility to the perplexities and complications which are characteristic of jungle warfare. Getting to know the enemy better is the first step in solving the problem.

